Mr. Erwin Knoll, editor
The Progressive
409 East Main St.,
Madison, WI 53703

3/11/90

Dear Erwin Knoll,

You begin your letter of the fifth by referring to our previous correspondence about what the Progressive has published about the State of Israel and then say, "I see little point in reviving the debate." What "debate"? There has been none in our exchange of letters and there sure as hell has never been any in any issue of your magazine or Navasky's that I can recall. The one-sidedness, the lack of any mention of anything other than abuse of Arabs, presented as an Israeli monoply, and the editorial intent not to inform your readers of anything else is precisely the reason I wrote you.

There is too much truth in the criticisms you make, which reasonable people cannot deny, but they lack balance, perspective and context. Although your criticisms are justified and to a degree I do and have always shared them, you exaggerate and at the same time oversimplify to the point where they are - and I mean no insult, I mean constructive criticism- they are dishonest. As an editor and as a writer you have published one side of a tragic controversy. There is no way your reader, if he lacks personal knowledge, can have the faintest glimmer of the real problems that do exist and their potential. A terrible, terrible potential. Or why this awful situation exists today.

You say you are a "proud Jew" yet in pretending to "demand better" of the Israeli government you place all the blame and responsibility for the frightful reality on Israeli governments and not even the smallest bit anywhere else. The actuality, as you well know, is that the only reason there is any controversy there today is because the Muslim world created it with the explicit intent of seeing to it that there is no State of Israel living in peace and security within guaranteed and secure borders.

Aside from Sadat's Egypt, what Muslim government has made peace with the State of Israel and why has not a single one of them? Does any dare after what happened to Sadat and before him Abdullah and to all the others of lower authority or no authority who dared discuss living in peace with a State of Israel?

Does any government insist on a state of war because it wants peace?

If the PLO wants peace, why does it persist in preserving the exact opposite in its charter? If Arafat, as our government pretends, assured the peaceful existence of the State of Israel, why did he not say "state" and instead referred only to "people?" You surely know that if he had assured the peaceful existence of the State of Israel he'd not be alive today. If he meant it, which his record provides no reason to believe.

From what you have published, has any of your readers any basis for knowing that there is a Palestinian state and that more than 75 percent of the Palestine territory and nothing else is what that state consists of?

I have never been to Israel and I have no Israeli friends. But I have a dear friend who managed to survive a number of pogroms and who goes there regularly and has Palestinian Arab friends who refute your representation of "cruel and barbarous treatment" of all Palestinians.

Have you compared Israel's defects with those of its neighbors or those of other Muslim states? What one Muslim state is as democratic? What Muslim state has a Jewish legislator? (Even assuming that there are those with the kind of freedom we associate with the existence of a legislature.) The Israeli legislator with greatest seniority is an Arab.

You portray Israel as the only racist state in the area. You have to know that is not true and that all the Muslim states are racist. Witness all the Jews they refuse to allow to leave, for one thing.

You get so carried away in your passionate refusal to confront a single issue that you suggest I was not sincere in referring to my "respect for the many fine things" you and Navasky have done. You demean yourself in this.

You then say I "ought to contemplate the possibility that in the matter we are not deviating from our customary set if values but affirming it."

There is no other matter I can recall on which you (both) have been so one-sided adn have sought to keep your readers in ignorance of everything except what you believe.

There is no other matter you could treat as you treat this one and hope to survive.

You refer to your criticisms of our government. Need I remind you of mine? There is no perfect government and ours, increasingly in my lifetime, which I think may be a little longer than yours, ours deserves more criticism. I have written much about ours but it is not 100 percent criticism and all my criticism is clearly of constructive intent. My writing has been on controversial subjects. I've written about thousands of people by name. And I've gotten more than 15,000 unsolicited letters from strangers when it was not easy even to get my address most of the time. But I've not gotten a single complaint from anyone who protested that I had treated him or the matter in which he was involved unfairly.

I do not believe that your or Navasky's or your publications values are represented by what you publish about the State of Israel. If I did, I'd not subscribe and I'd not send you both small contributions and I'd not give your magazines to those who do not subscribe to them.

It is precisely because of the respect I do have for the many fine things you both have done that I wonder how you can be so one-sided, I think so dishonest to yourselves and to your readers and the obligations you bear trusting readers.

I did not even suggest that you should not criticize the policies of the State of Israel (and I'll give you the benefit of thinking you meant some, not what you said, all), and I can't remember any Israeli government some of whose policies I did not criticize. I am not at all sympathetic to Shamir or what he represents, or the Sharons or Kahanes. I did suggest and I do mean you you are unbalanced to the point of dishonesty and that what you have published is entirely unfair and unreal.

I also do not practice the religion into which I was born, haven't since bar mitzvah. But I try to live by our ancient belief and tradition and I hope this is reflected in my writing <u>and</u> my criticisms <u>and</u> my defenses of our government against unfair criticism of it.

So I won't be able to pray for you in schul. But I hope for you and your reputation and perhaps, in time, your self-respect, that you can bring yourself to genuinely think this through and not just react in passion and in anger.

Ask yourself, instead of spouting off at me, if you have been fair and honest, if you have imposed upon the trust of trusting readers, if they have any way of understanding from what you publish what the realities are in that tortured area. You might try to think about whether another holocaust may yet come. And if it does, what could have contributed to it or made it more likely.

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg